

Jan Mathis
Assistant in Extension, Natural Resources
The University of Arizona
Navajo County Cooperative Extension
Chair of the Eastern Arizona Counties Organization Resource Advisory
Committee

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To: House Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Thank you for the opportunity to address the subcommittee on Public Law 106-393, and uses of Titles 1 and 2 funding resources.

My name is Jan Mathis, and I am an Assistant in Extension, Natural Resources, for The University of Arizona, Navajo County Cooperative Extension and Chair of the Eastern Arizona Counties Organization Resource Advisory Committee. I am also a member of the White Mountain Natural Resources Working Group which strongly supports the current law.

The Eastern Arizona Counties Organization is comprised of five Arizona counties - Apache, Gila, Graham, Greenlee and Navajo - located along the Mogollon Rim, the largest stand of Ponderosa Pines in the United States. These counties include 3,040,255 acres of national forest land.

Re: Title 1 funding for schools

Forest fees received by the small, rural school districts in these counties over the past few decades have contributed to their ongoing success. The fees have been utilized in a myriad of ways depending on the needs of the individual school districts. Without this funding, most of these schools would be unable to compete for quality teachers and their local tax bases would be greatly impacted.

RE: Resource Advisory Committees authorized under PL-106-393

I am chair of the Eastern Arizona Counties Organization Resource Advisory Committee. Although our rural counties have relatively small populations and broad interests we have been able to develop strong collaborative partnerships among representatives from government, industry, local environmental groups and members of the public at large to build consensus on local forest management issues. We meet approximately three times a year in small communities across the five counties. This gives committee members more involvement in the RAC process and the opportunity to see more of the local needs. To date we have expended approximately \$1.2 million on 29 Title 2

projects within our five county boundaries and the Tonto and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.

Our RAC has been highly effective because:

1. Our main emphasis has always been on forest health thinning, improvement and restoration projects aimed at protecting rural communities at risk. We feel strongly that these types of projects also improve watersheds and roads.
2. From the beginning we developed clear operating guidelines and ground rules. While we agree to disagree, we recognize our “common ground” approach to getting on-the-ground projects accomplished.
3. Our RAC encourages collaborative partnerships among the project applicants to better utilize our funding. All of our projects identify communities at risk through our recently developed Community Wildfire Protection Plans.
4. Each of the five-person groups realizes that they have veto power over any proposal. This has resulted in new project proposals being amended to satisfy all three groups, necessitating a collaborative process of negotiations.
5. The first several meetings were used to learn about the requirements of the law and then set evaluation criteria for the types of proposals to be considered. It resulted in the decision by this RAC to include forest thinning projects to qualify as meeting the needs of the law for improved watershed conditions.
6. The type of projects has evolved from strictly Forest Service proposals to a larger mix of proponents and project types from the counties and communities at large that vie for the funding.
7. This is what we have learned from the process:
 - We have lively and entertaining discussions on the merits of each project
 - The Congressionally mandated process seems to be working
 - Our original RAC members have voluntarily agreed to be appointed for a second term.

Continued collaboration among the counties, local municipalities, Forest Service, schools, environmental groups and local citizens is essential to the success of Resource Advisory Committees. Our RAC membership has included county supervisors, a state senator, and a city councilwoman.

Attached for your review is a table of RAC-recommended projects from the past three years. Please note that the monies received have been equitably distributed among the counties in our RAC. Our next meeting will feature these successful grant applications.

Our RAC is proud of its accomplishments over the past three years. As conscientious stewards of the land and local stakeholders we are committed to collaborative partnerships that will guide our forest land management. Through our efforts we hope to restore healthy forests and watersheds for future generations.

I urge you to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 with suggested changes to provide continuing benefit to the children, communities and forests in our five rural counties in Arizona. The recommendations for changes in the law on behalf of our RAC include:

- Aligning the new authorization of the law with the current management emphasis on forest restoration to include forest thinning to specifically improve watershed conditions
- Eliminate the concept of “merchantable material contracting pilots”

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'll be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet A. Mathis

Asst. in Extension, Natural Resources, U of A, Navajo County Coop. Ext.
Eastern Arizona Counties Organization Resource Advisory Chair